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ABSTRACT

The Finnish-Canadian Citizenship Project was organized to teach English to older Canadians of Finnish descent in British Columbia. The 24 enrollees had between one and ten years of formal schooling. The Finnish Canadians use a dialect of English words with Finnish pronunciations that must be unlearned in order to learn English. The students established the course objectives and stipulated that they wanted teachers who understood their special linguistic problems. Diagnostic interviews, using an audiovisual device to picture the speech patterns of teacher and student, were used to divide the class into three groups based on the level of fluency. The Berlitz method was used, and teachers concentrated on sounds that present special difficulties for Finns--w, wh, ch, f, z, th. During interviews at the last class, students were permitted to evaluate their experiences. Most reported an improvement in speaking ability and self-conficence and a loss of timidity in communicating with others in groups. Implications of the program considered useful for adult educators include: (1) the wisdom of making initial contacts with participants through a person they trust, who understands the problems of the particular ethnic group; (2) the value of having the participants plan their own program; (3) the importance of arranging for a group to learn together; and (4) the need for diagnostic sessions. (KM)

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ENGLISH FOR "OLD" CANADIANS:

THE FINNISH PROJECT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The past decade has witnessed rapid growth in programs designed to teach "new" Canadians, especially adults, the language of their adopted country. These programs, which have sprung up under the aegis of Federal and Provincial governments, bear such titles as "English for New Canadians," "English As A Second Language," and "Spoken English." With all this activity on behalf of "new" Canadians, scarcely any attention has been paid to "old" Canadians--immigrants who have lived here for periods up to forty years in almost total linguistic and cultural isolation. Caught up as many of us are in the myth of the Canadian mosaic, with its implications of unity in diversity, we have overlooked the plight of these people hidden in their ethnic ghettoes. They are forgotten Canadians.

How much do we of the dominant social group know about their problems? Do we realize, for example, how dependency on the ghetto, with its devotion to the native language and its foreign life-styles, handicaps them when seeking employment or aspiring to better jobs? Are we aware that these people cannot fulfil their roles as citizens, either in their own community or in the life of the nation? On a more personal level, they often have trouble communicating with their own grandchildren, who quickly master English and may abandon their native language altogether. The situation is exacerbated when the youth marry outside the ethnic group. And, of course, the older generation is barred from social contacts with their English-speaking neighbours. Such isolation, as Anderson and Niemi point out in Adult Education and the Disadvantaged Adult, "breeds insecurity, timidity, and fear, which result in a reluctance to change."[1]

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All these problems had become pressing concerns for a group of "old" Canadians of Finnish descent residing in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Out of their need to learn English, these 24 men and women, with a minister from the Lutheran Church of America acting as a facilitator, organized themselves into a non-profit group called the Maple Ridge Finnish-Canadian Committee and sought help from Douglas College and the Maple Ridge School District in designing a course in English. The resulting Finnish-Canadian Citizenship Project was funded by grants from the Provincial Government and the Federal Department of the Secretary of State (Citizenship and Social Development Branch). In addition, the Finnish Kaleva Sisters and Brothers Lodge No. 27, Maple Ridge, gave a small grant to support the project. Thus, it became possible to offer the course at a nominal fee to the participants.

Background of Participants

The 24 people who enrolled consisted of 10 men ranging in age from 23 to 72 and 14 women between 28 and 70. The median age for the entire group was 55. Other demographic and socio-economic data revealed that 22 of the 24 people were born in Finland, and that all but one had completed formal schooling there. The exception was a Canadian-born Finn who had been educated here. The amount of schooling varied from 1 to 10 years (median 7 years) for the women and from 2 to 8 years (median 5 years) for the men. As for residence, the women had lived in Canada from 10 to 44 years, and the men from 10 to 48 years. For both groups, the median number of years of residence here was 23 years. As anticipated, all the women classified themselves as "housewives." The men were skilled tradesmen or semi-skilled labourers.

Data on membership in community organizations showed that 16 persons belonged to one or more organizations and that, invariably, these were ethnic in nature. The finding illustrates the phenomenon whereby these people, already isolated from Canadian society, turn inward to the confines of the ethnic ghetto; Aaltio, writing as recently as 1969, describes the situation thus:

> The community activities of Finnish-Canadians have retained an intensity and variety no longer seen in the Finnish areas of the United States. Both cultural and athletic interests flourish; the impressive annual Finnish-Canadian festivals are attended by thousands of Finns from all parts of the large country. There is also some Finnish publishing in Canada, including three newspapers in the Finnish language.[2]

This natural tendency to seek social and psychological security within the ethnic community creates a cycle. As the immigrant retreats from the new society, his isolation intensifies. His "differentness" then becomes more obvious to himself and others, making his isolation virtually complete. As Waisanen writes:

> In his own neighborhood, with his own social affairs, he was more easily persuaded to see himself as essentially different from those who were not of his kind. This typical group-out phenomenon, with its biases, stereotypes, and emotional currents, further decreased inter-group contact. In effect, the immigrant became more visible. He could be identified geographically as well as culturally. His foreignness acquired a physical dimension, and he was more easily placed in the social system.[3]

Before one could assist the Finnish-Canadians participating in the British Columbia project, it was important to find out how many had enrolled previously in an English language course. If so, what had happened? If not, why not? One man had attended a course offered in Vancouver, but had withdrawn after a month, complaining that he felt "restricted." Another man and a woman had enrolled in a night school course, but had stopped attending because the teacher seemed unmindful of the special problems that beset Finns in pronouncing English words. Several individuals who had not enrolled previously in classes gave reasons like pressures of work, care of small children, and lack of opportunity. A few people confessed to being "lazy." Probably the real reason was that these

people had not previously perceived a need for English language instruction.

It should be added that among some members of the group a dialect had evolved which Kolehmainen describes as "a curious mixture of . . . English words and Finnish pronunciation,"[4] and which is known in the United States as "Finglish." Because the Finnish-Canadian immigrants had mastered neither the English alphabet nor the rules of pronunciation, this dialect was incomprehensible to their English-speaking neighbours. Worse, those who speak it believe that they have developed an easy substitute for English, a slang that will help them cope with the new cultural setting. In fact, they have acquired some bad habits that must be unlearned if they hope to acquire even rudimentary facility in the language. Here are some examples of how English words are revised to agree with Finnish phonetic systems:

hospital - hospitalli; co-operative - cooperatiivi; farm - farmi. The corresponding Finnish words were "sairaala," "osuustoiminnallinen" and "maatalo."[5]

What had awakened the Finnish-Canadians after all these years of living in Canada? Why did this group, with no history of recent participation in formal learning, suddenly desire a course in English? Investigations revealed that many second-generation Finns had married non-Finns, resulting in a communications breakdown between the older Finns and their daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. Also, the hardworking Finnish men discovered that they were blocked from advancing in their jobs because they spoke only broken English and could neither read nor write it. Similar frustrations were experienced socially. Almost all members of the group acknowledged the efforts of non-Finnish people to establish neighborly relationships, but these had foundered; even Finns who knew some English had difficulty because of bad habits of pronunciation and sentence structure..

Course Planning

What were the expectations of this group that had initiated the Finnish-Canadian Citizenship Project? Through discussion in Finnish of their perceived needs with other Finnish people in the community, the group agreed that they wished to have an English class that would:

1. Help them to speak better.
2. Allow them to learn as a group of people who knew each other.
3. Give them an opportunity to discover what events and cultural activities are open to them as Finnish-Canadians residing in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

To accomplish these objectives, the group stipulated that they wanted teachers who understood their special linguistic problems. They also wanted the instruction to take place in a setting in which they would feel comfortable.

The latter condition was met when persons from St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Maple Ridge agreed that the church could be used for classes. This setting was felt to be much less threatening than a school might be to people who had had little formal education and then only in the distant past. Also, the church was the geographical center for participants residing in the communities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, forty miles east of Vancouver.

The selection of the Wallen School of Languages to design and conduct the course satisfied the first condition, for the director was Finnish-born and experienced in providing instruction to many ethnic groups in a variety of languages. From these experiences, he had created two linguistic charts - one which presented English sounds equivalent or similar to Finnish sounds, and another which showed English sounds having no counterpart in Finnish. It is necessary to remark here that the two languages are completely unrelated; the

Finnish language is a member of the Finno-Ugric sub-group of the Turco-Altai language family, while English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. The charts, though still in the developmental stage, proved useful to both teachers and students in analyzing problems encountered with spoken English.

Placement of Students

Teachers and students early recognized the need for some kind of diagnostic tool to divide the 24 people as nearly as possible into homogeneous groups. So, prior to the first class, the Director of the Wallen School of Languages and a teacher organized a diagnostic session, interviewing each person for five minutes and recording the problems. These sessions revealed the complexity of the approaching task, especially as some students had developed bad habits of speaking English. Consequently, the Director and the teachers decided to set aside the first class for further diagnostic work. At this session, they introduced an audio-visual device which literally "pictured," or made visible on a screen, the speech patterns of teacher and student and enabled them to observe the contrasts. This device, called a Lingua-Scope and developed at the Wallen School, proved useful for noting difficulties in articulation, stress, and timing.

In the fifteen-minute sessions, the staff learned that students experienced the greatest difficulty with the following sounds: "w" (wall), "wh" (nowhere), "ch" (church), "f" (fife), "z" (lazy), "th" (thin). Some of these problems can be explained by referring to the Finnish alphabet, which contains none of these consonants: b, c, f, q, w, x and z. As for vowels, Hakulinen reports that Finnish "is the only language in which the frequency of vowels exceeds that of consonants."[6] This preference for vowels is also reflected in the large number of diphthongs--16, in addition to 8 vowels and 14 consonants. Further

prob[illegible] of articulation for the Finn learning English involve the absence of sil[illegible] letters and articles in his native language.

The [illegible]rse

[illegible]rom the two diagnostic sessions, it became apparent that three levels of flue[illegible] existed within the group of 26 students. Hence, it was divided into three clas[illegible]: beginning, intermediate, and advanced. The diagnostic sessions also indi[illegible]ted that while teaching these older Canadians a working vocabulary, it woul[illegible]e necessary to correct certain bad habits. These were found to be similar to p[illegible]lems reported by Sahlman among the Finns in the United States: "Errors in gr[illegible]mar, omission of suffixes, confusion of the plural and singular, wrong infle[illegible]tion of verbs and wrong negative constructions..."[7]

[illegible]ach class was scheduled to meet twice weekly for twelve weeks, with each sessi[illegible]n lasting 1 1/2 hours - a total of 36 class hours. The Direct Method (pioneered by Berlitz) was selected as the teaching strategy, that is, English only [illegible]s used in the classroom, and the teachers concentrated on sounds that presen[illegible]t special difficulties for Finns. Content for the three classes was drawn from the Teacher's Manual I for Accelerated Canadian English. Developed by the Wallen School, the Manual emphasizes spoken English in the context of the various roles that an adult must perform. As one would expect, the three classes proceeded at different rates.

Evalu[illegible]tion

[illegible]valuation of the program was based on the three objectives which had been set [illegible] the group at the beginning, i.e.,

1. Help them speak better.
2. Allow them to learn as a group of people who knew each other.
3. Give them an opportunity to discover what events and cultural activities are open to them.

As mentioned earlier, the first objective was necessarily linked to a diagnosis of the problems of the individual student, and led to his being placed in one of three classes. Each student was evaluated daily by his teacher and areas of difficulty were recorded. In addition, more detailed progress reports were made at regular intervals, charting his progress in sentence building, stress and intonation, articulation, and comprehension. At one of the last sessions, the Lingua-Scope was again used to repeat some of the diagnostic material presented early in the program. By this means, the student could note his improvement over the twelve-week period.

Finally, an interview schedule was administered to each student at the last class. The purpose was two-fold: to acquire from him the demographic and socio-economic data cited above and to permit him to evaluate his learning experience. Most students responded positively, with 17 of the 24 indicating that they were more willing to speak English in shopping and other activities. Some comments were as follows: "I am willing to speak English with more self-confidence"; "I don't feel so nervous"; "I am no longer afraid to use English." Nine of the 24 reported that their English-speaking friends had noted an improvement in their spoken English. The remainder had not received any feedback at the time the interview was conducted.

The second objective was achieved immediately: people who knew each other did meet together in groups. An interesting outcome of this interaction was that they lost some of their shyness and timidity. A few students reported experiencing "a great freedom." Others, in expressing satisfaction with the learning experience, confessed, "We have even told our secrets."

Because of the short duration of the program, the third objective--designed to transport the students, literally and figuratively, out of the confines of

the ghetto--was only partly fulfilled. Hence, the next phase of instruction was planned specifically around this objective.

Implications

What has been learned from this project? First, it seems clear that the Finnish-Canadians in it represent an undetermined number of forgotten Canadians with specific educational needs that are not being served by public or private programs of adult education. These needs encompass much more than the ability to speak English, in order to acquire a job or to advance in it. We are talking about a whole complex of life skills that will enable these older Canadians to function in Canadian society--assuming their responsibilities as citizens while enjoying new social and cultural amenities.

The Finnish-Canadian project also provided insights into the behaviour of one sample of an ethnic population. Obviously, the descriptive nature of this study does not lend itself to generalizations about older members of ethnic groups. However, certain implications may be of interest to adult educators and teachers:

1. The wisdom, in an enterprise of this nature, of making initial contacts with participants through a person who is intimately associated with them and has their trust. He can function as a facilitator who understands the problems and behaviors of the ethnic group, and can interpret their feelings to the adult educator. He, in turn, can call upon the facilitator for help with a particular problem, such as difficulty in communicating a message to the group. Because the group will probably attach itself closely to the facilitator, he must know when and how to disengage himself so that the group will become independent.

2. The value of having a group of people from an ethnic ghetto plan their own program, setting objectives in terms of their perceived needs. These

objectives can then form a basis on which to evaluate the success of the program. Such involvement usually produces a feeling of commitment, which helps to explain the high motivation of the Finnish-Canadian group, as manifested in their attendance record and their progress in learning English.

3. The importance of arranging for a group to learn together. In the Finnish-Canadian project, this interaction among individuals who were familiar with each other's problems and attitudes seemed to promote confidence in speaking English.

4. The importance of giving a group the option of conducting classes in facilities other than a local school, The purpose is to reduce the anxiety of some participants with respect to formal learning, especially those whose youthful experiences in an authoritatian school system had been negative. If their perception of adult learning is skewed as a result, they will welcome an informal environment. In any case, it will probably be necessary for the teacher to take time to create a climate of trust.

5. The need for diagnostic sessions in which to analyze problems. Here, such devices as audio tape recorders or VTR's offer help to teachers and students alike. As noted earlier, the Lingua-Scope proved useful in the Finnish-Canadian project for uncovering problems of articulation. It should be borne in mind that a device may alarm students because it appears to "test" them. The teacher can reassure them by carefully explaining the purpose, or positive values of a device.

Diagnostic sessions will normally take place on a one-to-one basis between the teacher and the individual student. Both should keep systematic records on which to base the student's subsequent learning experiences. The records will serve as constant checks against which teacher and student can evaluate his progress.

6. The need for awareness on the part of teacher and student of similarities and differences between the native language and the language being learned. In the Finnish-Canadian project, the charts comparing and contrasting Finnish and English sounds proved useful in locating sources of difficulty in pronunciation.

7. The realization that people whose formal schooling lies far in the past will have special problems, as opposed to people with more recent schooling. Regression, or the return to old mistakes--always a problem in the teaching-learning process--may loom larger, because bad habits have become fixed over many years. The situation requires patience on the part of both teacher and student.

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